



# THE NEW JERSEY ADVOCATE



Quarterly Publication

A Publication Of The Division Of The Ratepayer Advocate

Summer 2004

## Message From The Director



The long hot days of summer may mean carefree days for schoolchildren and vacations for some families but for the Ratepayer Advocate, this summer is anything but slow.

This summer the Ratepayer Advocate is working towards the conclusion of hearings on the electric companies' applications to increase their rates following deregulation of the industry. We are also reviewing applications by natural gas companies for increases to basic gas supply rates, and have been involved in several major water rate cases on behalf of ratepayers.

In the coming months, the Ratepayer Advocate is also preparing for its participation in some very significant telecommunications cases and will continue its fight against cable rate increases. We are also analyzing the emerging telecommunications technology - Internet telephone service known as "VOIP" or Voice over Internet Protocol.

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## More Protections, More Support for New Jersey's Seniors and Working Families

My Administration is increasing our support to New Jersey's consumers. In our budget for the next year, we are dedicating more than \$5.8 million to help keep the cost of utilities down. Whether it is heating and cooling our homes, turning on a light or making a phone call, my Administration is continuing its fight to make life in New Jersey better for the average consumer.



As you may know, I recently launched the FAIR Plan, providing 2 million seniors and working families with increased property tax relief. With larger Homestead Rebate checks, as well as full funding for this year's Senior Freeze program, we are helping those who need it most.

Over the past two years we have made great progress on several fronts. Last year I signed needed legislation to fix the State's energy aggregation program, giving individuals the power to lower their energy prices by purchasing power in groups. For those on a low or fixed income, we created the Universal Service Fund program to ensure that New Jersey utility customers pay an affordable portion of their monthly household income. In addition, we negotiated a settlement with Verizon that provides New Jersey residential customers with four free directory assistance calls per month, for a savings of up to \$24 a year.

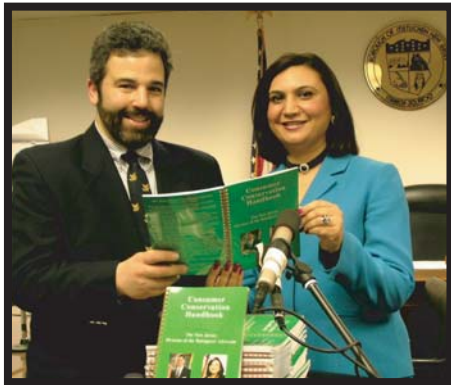
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## RATEPAYER ADVOCATE PUBLICATIONS



Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh (right) and Metuchen Council President Alan Grossman at Borough Hall on May 12, 2004, part of the Ratepayer Advocate's statewide Consumer Education Tour, providing consumers with presentations on how to conserve energy and how to better understand utility bills.



### CONSUMER ASSISTANCE HANDBOOK: A Guide From The New Jersey Division Of The Ratepayer Advocate For Natural Gas, Water, Electric, Telephone And Cable Television Customers - No Cost

Provides utility customers detailed information needed to select competitive energy and telecommunications providers in newly competitive utility markets.



### CONSUMER CONSERVATION HANDBOOK ("The Green Book") - No Cost

"The Green Book" provides practical information in a room-by-room conservation guide to help consumers reduce energy use for heating and cooling, along with tips on how to choose efficient appliances.



### MANUAL FOR GOVERNMENT ENERGY AGGREGATORS: A Guide To Aggregation Procedures Pursuant To The Electric Discount And Energy Competition Act As Amended - \$50 For Gov/Not-For-Profit; \$100 All Others.

A 206 page technical guide to planning for municipal, county, or other community energy needs. Includes most recent, relevant Board of Public Utilities rules and Orders; free regular updates. A must-have for organizations considering aggregating their utility purchasing needs.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR ELECTRIC AND NATURAL GAS BILLS

**Cubic Feet Used, Rate Schedule, Bill Calculation, BGS, DEL.** Do you understand these terms? Probably not if you are like most of us. But these terms are found on consumers' energy bills. The Division of the Ratepayer Advocate has prepared fact sheets to help explain the maze of numbers and terms found on natural gas and electric billing statements from the various companies. When you understand your energy bills, you will be able to check for errors, monitor your exact energy usage and choose the best most efficient energy solutions for your home. To obtain a natural gas or electric bill fact sheet from the Ratepayer Advocate, log on to [www.rpa.state.nj.us](http://www.rpa.state.nj.us) or write or call the Ratepayer Advocate at the contact information below.

To order copies of these publications or see others, please visit our website or call the Ratepayer Advocate's office.

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## RATEPAYER ADVOCATE CHALLENGES FEDERAL DECISION LEADING TO HIGHER STATE CABLE TV RATES

Since 1996, by an act of the U.S. Congress, the final authority to raise and change cable TV rates and services has been taken from the Board of Public Utilities and State Legislature and placed with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), leaving only the Basic Service Tier (BST) rates reviewable by the Board and the Ratepayer Advocate. That authority will also be removed from State control, if the FCC decides that "effective cable TV competition" exists in various state communities, at which time neither the Board nor the Ratepayer Advocate will have the authority to review even basic service rates.

On April 15, the FCC declared that "effective competition" exists in 49 communities in 10 northern counties served by Cablevision because, according to the application filed by Cablevision, at least 15% of cable TV customers subscribed to Direct Broadcast Satellite Service (DBSS). After careful review of the data that Cablevision used to support its assertions the Ratepayer Advocate determined that the data submitted to the FCC by the company were flawed and unreliable, since Cablevision relied upon 2000 census data and 2002 and 2003 subscriber data, clearly skewing the results.



To protect New Jersey's cable customers, Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh (third from left) announces a joint effort by the Ratepayer Advocate and Board of Public Utilities to fight a federal ruling that allows basic cable rates to go unregulated in 49 towns serviced by Cablevision. From left, Senate President Richard Codey, BPU President Jeanne Fox, Ms. Singh and Manville Mayor Angelo Corradino at press conference held on May 18, 2004 at the Ratepayer Advocate's office.

This FCC decision, if not reversed, will not only deprive 200,000 subscribers in Cablevision's service areas of the protection of their interests by the Ratepayer Advocate and Board of Public Utilities but

will also establish a precedent that can have consequences for other cable TV customers throughout New Jersey.



Seema M. Singh poses with members of the telecommunications team, voted by their coworkers to receive the 2004 Employee Recognition "Teamwork" Award. From left, Joshua Seidemann, Esq. Ava-Marie Madeam, Esq., Ms. Singh and Christopher White, Esq. Managing Attorney of the team. Missing is Jose Rivera-Benitez, Esq.

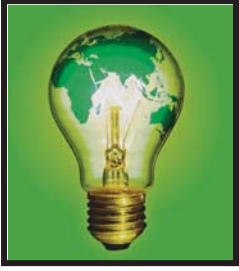
Because basic cable TV is an essential service on which many state residents rely, particularly seniors and low income residents, the Ratepayer Advocate determined to appeal the FCC decision. In an unprecedented joint action, the Ratepayer Advocate, joined by the Board of Public Utilities, appealed to the five commissioners of the FCC to overturn this decision, based on faulty data, that can lead to even higher basic cable rates for many thousands of state residents. The appeal was filed with the support of Governor McGreevey and legislative leaders including Senate President Richard J. Codey and the New Jersey League of Municipalities and AARP.

Ratepayer Advocate Seema Singh observed at the press conference held on May 18, 2004 to announce the intention to appeal the FCC's decision "that such an important decision affecting all state consumers must not be based on mismatched data. While consumers benefit from better service and fairer prices when a healthy competitive environment exists, until real competition occurs, basic cable television rate must remain regulated by the BPU".

The joint appeal by the Ratepayer Advocate and the Board of Public Utilities of the FCC decision to approve Cablevision's application is currently under review by the federal agency.



## RATEPAYER ADVOCATE MAKES PRESENTATION TO OCEAN COUNTY CONSUMER FORUM



On June 17, 2004, at the invitation of the New Jersey Natural Gas Company, Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh spoke to the Ocean County Consumer Forum at the Woodlake Country Club in Lakewood. Ms. Singh presented conservation tips, including how to purchase energy efficient appliances and how to conduct home energy audits. She also explained income assistance programs that help eligible customers pay their energy bills. The Ratepayer Advocate's Conservation and Consumer Assistance Handbooks were also distributed to the participants to share with their community and constituents. **The following Ratepayer Advocate presentations are**

**available for viewing or downloading on the Ratepayer Advocate website at [www.rpa.state.nj.us](http://www.rpa.state.nj.us):**

Government Aggregation: A Guide for Consumers, Government Aggregation: The Consumer Education Challenge, Bringing the Benefits of Energy Competition to Consumers, Conservation, New Jersey's Utility Assistance Programs, Clean Energy Program, and Understanding Your Utility Bill.

The Ratepayer Advocate strongly encourages all New Jersey consumers to use energy wisely. **Here are some ideas that can help save on your summer cooling bills...**

### Outside the Home

- ✓ Regular maintenance will keep your air conditioner operating efficiently throughout the summer.
- ✓ Keep shrubbery away from your central air conditioner - blocked vents reduce the unit's ability to exhaust air.

### In the Kitchen and Bath

- ✓ Cook, launder and bathe in the early mornings or late evenings instead of the heat of the day.
- ✓ Cook by microwave, slow cookers or crock pots that do not heat up a room the way an oven does. Even better, barbecue outdoors.

### Practical Matters Inside the Home

- ✓ Use draft guards at the bottom of doors that open into non-air conditioned rooms.
- ✓ Draw blinds and shades to keep heat out during the day. Open windows and shades during the evening hours when it's cooler.
- ✓ Use electric fans instead of air conditioning for cooling.
- ✓ Turn off central air conditioning 30 minutes before you plan to leave your house. It will maintain a cool temperature during that time.
- ✓ Raise the thermostat from 73 to 78 degrees to generate savings of up to 15% in cooling costs.

### Energy Efficiency/Clean Energy

- ✓ When purchasing an air conditioning unit, look for an energy efficient unit. The Energy Guide label provides an Energy Efficiency Rating ("EER") for window units or a Seasonal Energy Efficiency Rating ("SEER") for central air conditioners. Be sure the equipment you choose is the right size for the area you are cooling.
- ✓ The New Jersey Clean Energy Program sponsored by the Board of Public Utilities provides rebates for customers who purchase energy efficient central air conditioners or heat pumps.
- ✓ ENERGY STAR rebates are also available for new window air conditioners purchased between April 1-September 15, 2004. **Completed rebate requests must be received by October 15, 2004. Check details at <http://www.njcleanenergy.com> or call your electric utility.**

## THE RATEPAYER ADVOCATE EDUCATES CONSUMERS

CONTACT US TO SCHEDULE A PRESENTATION IN YOUR AREA

(973) 648-2690

[njratepayer@rpa.state.nj.us](mailto:njratepayer@rpa.state.nj.us)

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### Where we've been...

**May 13, 2004** - The Ratepayer Advocate spoke at the New Jersey Natural Gas 2004 Consumer Forum in Eatontown.

**May 12, 2004** - The Ratepayer Advocate discussed energy conservation and understanding utility bills with residents and local officials at the Metuchen Borough Council Chambers.

**June 17, 2004** - The Ratepayer Advocate spoke at the New Jersey Natural Gas 2004 Consumer Forum at the Woodlake Country Club in Lakewood.



Seema Singh addresses a group of senior citizens.

#### Message From The Director

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As part of our outreach/education effort, my staff and I will continue to visit many communities and civic organizations, at their invitation and the request of their state and local legislative representatives. Our goal is to educate consumers about conserving energy and water as a way to lower utility bills; how to read their utility bills; clean energy and financial assistance programs available to ratepayers; learn about cable TV issues; and many other current utility related issues of concern.

We distribute our publications prepared specifically to help people understand the changing utility markets in New Jersey and to help them understand their rights as ratepayers. For a list of upcoming presentations, see the **Calendar of Events**.

My staff and I look forward to continue working with you and for you in the months ahead whenever rates and services for electric, natural gas, telecommunications, cable TV, water and wastewater are being decided, *and to assist you in any way we can with questions or concerns about your utilities*. For details on all the Ratepayer Advocates current activities please check our website at [www.rpa.state.nj.us](http://www.rpa.state.nj.us).

Best wishes.

*Seema Singh*  
Ratepayer Advocate

Summer 2004

#### Where we're going...

**July 21, 2004** - The Ratepayer Advocate will give consumer education presentation on Energy Conservation, Clean Energy, and How to Read Your Utility Bills to the Ocean City Utilities Commission and local residents at 1:00 p.m. at the Public Safety Building in Ocean City.

**July 29, 2004** - The Ratepayer Advocate will give consumer education presentation on Energy Conservation and How to Read Your Utility Bills to members of the local AARP at 1:00 p.m. in Cape May.

**August 12, 2004** - The Ratepayer Advocate will give consumer education presentation on Energy Conservation at New Jersey Natural Gas Consumer Forum at 8:30 a.m. at the Sheraton Parsippany. For more information contact NJNG Public Information Officer Roseanne Koberle at (732) 938-1112.

**September 22, 2004** - The Ratepayer Advocate speaks at the New Jersey Association of Counties' Annual Conference at Bally's Park Place, Atlantic City. For more information on the conference visit the Association's website at [www.njac.org](http://www.njac.org) or call (609) 394-3467.



**I am having problems paying my natural gas and electric bills. What should I do and where can I get assistance?**

Take action quickly and contact your utility to arrange a practical payment schedule. You are legally entitled to one deferred payment plan per year. You should also consider enrolling in the utility's budget billing program, which allows you to pay the same amount each month, taking the guesswork out of planning your budget.

**The State of New Jersey also offers several payment assistance programs for qualified recipients. To learn if you and your family qualify, call the following toll-free telephone numbers:**

- **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) - 1-800-510-3102**

LIHEAP helps pay your heating bills. If your household meets certain income amounts (in a 1-person household, monthly gross income may not exceed \$1,310), you may be eligible.

- **New Jersey Lifeline Credit Program 1-800-792-9745**

NJ Lifeline provides is a \$225 yearly credit for your electric or gas bill. Qualified recipients must be 65 years old, or a disabled adult at least 18 years old who is receiving Social Security Disability benefits. Your income must be under \$20,437 for a single person, or \$25,058 for a married couple.

- **NJ SHARES - 1-866-NJSHARES (657-4273)**

NJ Shares helps you pay your electric and gas bills. There are no applicable or required income guidelines.

**I see notices about public meetings concerning my utility's rates or services in my neighborhood newspaper. What happens at these meetings?**

The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities often holds public hearings to allow utility customers to comment on a pending case affecting utility rates and services. It is your best opportunity to make the Ratepayer Advocate, BPU and the Company aware of your concerns about the Company's service and its rates and we encourage you to participate. Your voice and those of your neighbor can really make a difference.

Here are some tips for participating in a public hearing:

**Come Early** - If possible, arrive at least 10 to 15 minutes ahead of the scheduled starting time so you can hear instructions offered by the Administrative Law Judge at the beginning of the hearing.

**Sign Up** - Sign up on the sign-in-sheet if you wish to testify.

**Prepare What You Want To Say In Advance** - If you are nervous about speaking in public, you can write out your statement and then read it at the hearing.

**Include Your Own Experiences** - As a customer of the utility, you have unique information. When you testify, give specific examples of the issues you are addressing. If other customers already have testified about the same issue, you can still mention it to show that the issue is not an isolated one.

**Speak Slowly And Clearly** - Your testimony is important. Make sure you are understood.

**For the last 3 months, my electric usage has been estimated and not based on actual usage. I work during the day and am not able to let the meter reader into my residence to take a reading. What can I do?**

New Jersey regulations do not require the utility company to notify customers ahead of time if the meter reader is unable to actually read a customer's meter on the scheduled date.

However, if you receive an estimated bill, and you think the bill is too high, you can call your utility's customer service division and give them the meter reading yourself. If you call in early enough, the company may send out a revised bill.



### Do Not Call Legislation

In an effort to further strengthen New Jersey's Do Not Call List, the toughest in the nation, the Assembly is moving forward with bill A-2290, which requires telemarketers to have a signed consent form or written request before making telemarketing sales calls to customers on the New Jersey Do Not Call List. The measure is sponsored by Assemblyman Jeff Van Drew (D-1), Assemblyman Frederick Scalera (D-36) and Assemblyman Michael Panter (D-12).

"This legislation will provide New Jersey's residents with added protection against unwanted telemarketers," said Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh.



Governor James E. McGreevey and Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh host the first Baisakhi Celebration at the Statehouse on April 23, 2004. Baisakhi is an important Sikh festival that marks the beginning of the harvest season in India.

### More Protections, More Support







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These are all changes designed make living more affordable in the Garden State. After two years of tough decisions and smart investments, New Jersey is back on the right track. Our jobs creation programs have raised the number of jobs in New Jersey to a record high, our economy is leading the region out of the national recession.

Thank you for your support in helping us achieve this goal.

  
James E. McGreevey  
Governor, State of New Jersey

### "Do Not Call" - Know Your Rights

-  Every telemarketer must register with the State so offenders can be punished.
-  Telemarketers must identify themselves and say why they are calling within the first 30 seconds of the call.
-  Fines up to \$20,000 for each violation.
-  No calls between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m.
-  To sign up: 1-888-382-1222 or [www.DoNotCall.gov](http://www.DoNotCall.gov)
-  To file a complaint: 1-888-NJNOCALL or [www.nj.gov/donotcall](http://www.nj.gov/donotcall)

### Energy Efficiency Standards

Ratepayer Advocate Seema M. Singh is supporting legislation to establish minimum energy efficiency standards for certain appliances and equipment sold or installed in New Jersey.

"Energy efficiency programs are a low-cost, high-benefit way to meet society's ever-increasing energy needs," the Ratepayer Advocate said in testimony submitted to the Assembly Telecommunications & Utilities Committee at a hearing on June 14, 2004.

Ms. Singh praised the sponsors of the bill, Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman and Assemblyman Wilfredo Caraballo, as well as the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group, for their commitment to the legislation.

"Every avenue should be explored to reduce our energy consumption and increase energy efficiency," Ms. Singh said. "This, in turn, will reduce the strain on our electric transmission system. Substantial economic and environmental benefits can be achieved from new efficiency standards."





## WATER CONSERVATION

The Division of the Ratepayer Advocate strongly encourages all New Jersey residents to use water efficiently and wisely - even when supplies are abundant. Water conservation not only protects water quality and supplies but reduces the need for wastewater. Here are some steps you can take to conserve water in the home:

- 💧 Take shorter showers
- 💧 Don't pour water down the drain if there is another use for it such as watering plants or cleaning your house
- 💧 Install aerators with flow restrictors on all household faucets to slow the flow of water
- 💧 Store drinking water in the refrigerator and don't let the tap run to cool water
- 💧 Avoid flushing the toilet unnecessarily. Dispose of waste in the trash and not in the toilet
- 💧 Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth
- 💧 Wash your car with soap and water from a bucket
- 💧 Only do full loads in clothes and dishwashers



Seema Singh with Ratepayer Advocate employees selected by their co-workers to receive the 2004 Employee Recognition Awards. From left, Sarah Steindel, Esq. and Vannessa Thompson, Co-workers of the Year, Seema Singh, and Pamela Wright, Customer Service Awardee.

## Governor McGreevey Announces Adoption Of New Clean Water Protections

Standing on the banks of the Nishisakawick Creek, on July 13th Governor James E. McGreevey announced the final adoption of Category One water quality protections for portions of 13 waterways and their feeding tributaries, totaling over 500 miles in length, in Bergen, Hunterdon, Monmouth and Ocean and Warren Counties. Protecting these waters as Category One provides the state's highest level of protection from over-development and helps ensure future generations will have clean and safe drinking water.

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